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## **Bridgeton Landfill: Officials Say the Bad Smells Could Pose Future Public Health Risk**

By [Sam Levin](#) Thu., Mar. 21 2013 at 10:30 AM

Missouri officials have released new data on a [Bridgeton landfill that environmental groups say is a major concern](#) -- not just because [it smells really terrible](#). The new information from the Missouri Department of Natural Resources tells a very different story about potential health concerns on site -- depending on who you ask.

Republic Services, the parent company of the landfill, sent out a lengthy statement yesterday saying it was pleased with the new air findings; it does not directly reference some of the more alarming parts of the report that activists are highlighting.

For [example](#): "If...conditions intensify further, these emissions could potentially pose a risk to public health," MDNR says.

Should residents be worried?

"It's definitely premature for Republic Services to assure the general public that everything is fine," Ed Smith, safe energy director for the Missouri Coalition for the Environment, tells Daily *RFT*. "While they can get away with saying everything is fine right now, they haven't tested for everything."

We first reported on the [Bridgeton controversy back in January](#) when news stations were flocking to the city to report on just how awful the stench was (it even burned the eyes of a *KMOV* [staffer](#)!)

Since then, environmental and labor groups have been criticizing Republic Services, most recently with expert testimony saying that the bad smells at the Bridgeton landfill, coupled with radioactivity at a neighboring landfill -- which Republic Services also operates -- could produce a disastrous ["dirty bomb" combination](#).

Republic has pushed back against accusations, slamming the expert testimony as speculative and false and criticizing activists for trying to use scare tactics.

Today's latest feud relates to additional air monitoring [reports](#) from MDNR, based on studies conducted from February 13 through March 15.

Here are excerpts of the report that Smith tells us are most concerning:

-In regards to [hydrogen sulfide](#) levels:

In the case of hydrogen sulfide, the screening data identified a potential public health concern that warranted further evaluation.... Although it is not possible to draw definitive conclusions from this screening data, [Department of Health and Senior Services] deems that additional monitoring or other actions are warranted.

Exposure to elevated levels of hydrogen sulfide can cause headache, irritation to eyes, nose or throat, and may cause difficulty breathing especially for persons with asthma or other chronic respiratory conditions. In fact, any intense odors can have public health effects on both quality of life and well-being, particularly for sensitive individuals. Symptoms generally associated with offensive odors typically disappear once the odors dissipate.

-And concerns about the so-called "[subsurface smoldering event](#)" (which Republic Services says is heat underground, but the coalition says is clearly a "landfill fire"):

The subsurface smoldering event reaction has caused increased odors to be generated from the decomposition of waste above the level expected through routine decomposition, rapid settlement - more than expected for waste decomposing at depth, heat in gas extraction wells and increased generation of various landfill gases including hydrogen....

These odors continue to cause a nuisance. If emissions from the subsurface smoldering event are not controlled or conditions intensify further, these emissions could potentially pose a risk to public health.

#### **Continue for more from Ed Smith and response from Republic Services.**

"It could pose health problems in the future," Smith says. "On one hand, we have sporadic testing on days when there may not have been significant odors.... On the other hand, their testing has not been as rigorous as it needs to be and...as thorough as it needs to be."

Republic Services, however, has different take on the results -- and says it welcomes continued scrutiny as the MDNR recommends.

Tim Trost, area president for Republic Services, encouraged additional studying and says in a statement, "We are pleased that MDNR's latest air testing results showed 'no chemicals detected above a level of public health concern' in the nearby residential area."

His statement continues:

The health and safety of our neighbors and 350 on-site employees is most important to us and we are pleased that the latest round of monitoring for carbon monoxide, volatile organic compounds (VOC) and sulfur dioxide did not identify any concentrations of concern for public health.

And of the concerns around hydrogen sulfide, the company says that it is undertaking a "careful review" of on-site activities and off-site conditions to evaluate MDNR's report of the potentially concerning detection levels. Still, Republic Services argues that its preliminary review suggests "that the reported elevated hydrogen sulfide levels are not representative of odor emissions from the Bridgeton Landfill."

Here's the full news release from Republic Services:

Republic Services Welcomes the Release of MDNR's Most Recent Air Findings for Bridgeton Landfill

MDNR: "Samples collected in a nearby residential area also showed no chemicals detected above a level of public health concern"

(Bridgeton, Missouri): Tim Trost, the Area President for Republic Services, the parent company of Bridgeton Landfill LLC, welcomed the release of additional air data regarding Bridgeton Landfill and encouraged additional testing.

Said Trost, "We are pleased that MDNR's latest air testing results showed 'no chemicals detected above a level of public health concern' in the nearby residential area."

MDNR has posted additional air monitoring results, including a summary of ongoing monitoring conducted between February 13th and March 15th of 2013. You can see those reports [here](#).

Added Trost, "The health and safety of our neighbors and 350 on-site employees is most important to us and we are pleased that the latest round of monitoring for carbon monoxide, volatile organic compounds (VOC) and sulfur dioxide did not identify any concentrations of concern for public health."

Republic Services is undertaking a careful review of on-site activities and off-site conditions to evaluate MDNR's report of elevated average hydrogen sulfide detections on three days, but our preliminary review of the data, the instrumentation used, and wind direction on the days of elevated readings would suggest that the reported elevated hydrogen sulfide levels are not representative of odor emissions from the Bridgeton Landfill.

Said Trost, "More than 30 of our on-site employees and contractors were wearing 4-gas meter monitors that detect hydrogen sulfide and other gases and during this time period. We did not have on-site conditions in February that triggered any worker health protection alarms. We look forward to working with MDNR to better understand what may have caused this intermittent elevation on their devices."

According to MDNR's website, the elevated hydrogen sulfide findings "were not in excess of public health protection guidelines for exposures lasting less than 24 hours."

Concluded Trost, "We look forward to the additional tests and sharing the results with our employees and the public."